WHY RESEARCH?

Research is at the heart of every academic curriculum, and it will show up in your classes in obvious and not so obvious ways. But that's not the only reason you should know how to research. Why is it so important to learn how to research?

1. **It's a real-life skill!** The research you do now will prepare you for the day when your job depends on your ability to find answers for yourself or to evaluate the answers of others.

2. **Knowing how to research helps you understand what information you can trust.** You won't fall prey to unverified "facts" because you'll know the difference between unsupported assertions and verified sources.

3. **It is the most exciting part of your education!** OK—this may be idealistic, but research can be as fun as solving a mystery or a puzzle. You can experience the excitement of discovering something no one else knows.

Mini-assignment—Researching research in the workplace.

Professionals do research in the workplace because they need to answer a question in order to accomplish some goal.

The goal for this mini-assignment is to find out the answer to this question:

Is research really that important in the workplace?

Find an adult who has a job that you think you might like to have. Not the perfect job, maybe, but one you can see yourself doing someday. Ask her about research on her job. Don't stop with activities that she calls research—ask about any tasks that require her to find out something she didn't know to accomplish some goal. Ask how much these skills matter to be good at her job. Share the results of your research with your classmates.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 3–4.

CHOOSING A TOPIC: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The success of your project will depend on your ability to discover or invent a good research question. By thinking about the topic, the questions you have about the topic, and the significance of your topic, you can develop a strong research paper.

You can help yourself think about your project by describing it in a three-step sentence that states your **TOPIC + QUESTION + SIGNIFICANCE** (or **TQS**):

TOPIC: I am working on the topic of _____,

QUESTION: because I want to find out _____,

SIGNIFICANCE: so that I can help others understand _____.

Don't worry if at first you can't think of something to put as the significance in the third step. As you develop your answer, you'll find ways to explain why your question is worth asking!

TQS sentence example:

I am working on the topic of stories about the Battle of the Alamo,

because I want to find out why its story became a national legend,

so that I can help my classmates understand how such regional myths have shaped America's sense of a national identity.

Note: The TQS formula is meant to prime your thinking. Use it to plan and test your question, but don't expect to put it in your paper in exactly this form.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 12–13.

CORE OF AN ARGUMENT = CLAIM + REASONS + EVIDENCE

When your teacher says that you must *make* an argument to support your answer, don't think of *having* an argument. Instead, imagine an intense yet amiable conversation with people who want to know the answer to your questions as much as you do. They don't want to hear about your opinions but about reasoned claims you can support. They want to know what reasons led you to your claim and what evidence makes you think those reasons are true. They'll expect you to consider their point of view and address any questions or concerns they might have.

To create an argument, you will have to answer the questions that any rational person would raise when asked to do or believe something new. Each answer corresponds to one of the parts of argument.

Claim: *What's the answer to your question?*

Once you raise your research question, readers naturally want to know the answer. That answer is what you claim and then support.

Although many people think that black musical artists of the 1950s and 1960s were harmed when white performers "covered" black records by creating their own versions to sell to white audiences, I claim that the practice of racial covering actually helped the original artists more than it harmed them.$_{\text{claim}}$

Reasons: *Why should I believe that?*

Unless your answer is obvious (and if it is, the question is probably not worth asking), readers will not accept it at face value. They'll want to know why they should accept your claim as true.

Although . . . , I claim that the practice of racial covering actually helped the original artists more than it harmed them$_{\text{claim}}$ *because without covers white teens would not have heard or bought the original recordings,*$_{\text{reason 1}}$ *because covers gave white audiences a taste for blues, R&B, and gospel,*$_{\text{reason 2}}$ *and because white teens then began to seek out the work of black performers.*$_{\text{reason 3}}$

Evidence: *How do you know that?*

Even when your reasons seem plausible, responsible readers won't accept them just because you said so. They expect you to ground each reason in the factual evidence you collect from sources.

Although . . . , I claim that . . .$_{\text{claim}}$ *because . . .*$_{\text{reasons}}$ *My evidence that white teens would not have heard or bought the original recordings is as follows: [sales statistics, information on record distribution and radio play, quotations from performers and producers at the time, etc.]*$_{\text{evidence for reason 1}}$

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 18.

PLAN YOUR RESEARCH AROUND THE QUESTIONS OF ARGUMENT

Every argument must answer the three questions that define the core of an argument (claim, reasons, evidence), but cooperative arguments must answer a fourth (acknowledgment and response).

core

1. What's the answer to your research question? **Claim**
2. Why should I believe that? **Reasons**
3. How do you know that reason is true? **Evidence**
4. But have you considered this view (or this evidence, complication, objection, etc.)? **Acknowledgment & Response**

Create a plan to search for and read sources so that you have good answers to each of these questions.

1. **Claim:** If you begin without a claim that answers your research question, start by reading general articles about your topic in order to get ideas for possible answers.
2. **Reasons**: Once you have a claim, make a list of the reasons why you think that claim is true. If you think of too few reasons, do some more reading. If you still can't find any, look for another claim.
3. **Evidence:** Once you have a list of reasons, search for statistics, quotations, observations, and other facts that might serve as evidence to support each one. If you cannot find evidence for a reason, then you have to replace that reason. If you find evidence that goes against a reason, keep the evidence. You may need to acknowledge it in your paper.
4. **Acknowledgment & Response:** As you read for claims, reasons, and evidence, keep a record of anything that might complicate or contradict your argument. You will need to acknowledge it if you think it might also occur to your readers.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 21–22.

HOW TO PLAN YOUR TIME

You can't hope to write a decent research paper if you begin the night or even the week before it's due. This is confirmed not only by the experience of thousands of students but by studies of successful and unsuccessful writers. This research shows that the most successful writers tend to share some writing habits:

1. **They start drafting as early as possible,** before they think they have all the evidence they might need.
2. **They write in regular short periods** rather than in marathon bursts that dull their thinking and kill their interest.
3. **They set a goal** to produce a small number of pages every time they write, even if those pages are not very good.
4. **They report their progress** to someone else if possible, or on a chart if not.
5. **They anticipate that everything will take longer** than they think it should.

To be like these successful writers, follow these steps:

1. Set mini-goals with specific deadlines, starting backward from the paper's due date.
2. Give yourself at least one session to proofread.
3. Budget the time you'll need for finding and reading sources.
4. Plan for a day or two to find and test your research question.
5. Keep a calendar and track your progress as you go.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 24–25.

FINDING A RESEARCH QUESTION

Research is looping, messy, and unpredictable. You can manage it with a plan, as long as you are prepared to depart from it. The first step in that plan is one you cannot put off: to find a good research question.

As you look for the research question that will ground your project, keep in mind the following points:

1. **Value surprise and disagreement.** Look for ideas, claims, facts, or anything that makes you think, *Wow, I didn't know that!* or *How can that be true?* Not only will those matters hold your attention longer, but they will make it easier to get the attention of your readers.

2. **Make your topic manageable.** Try to figure out what others think is important about it and focus on that.

3. **Watch out for *Wikipedia*.** When you need information quickly, *Wikipedia* can be a godsend. But it is usually incomplete, and it does have errors, sometimes outrageous ones. Feel free to use *Wikipedia* for ideas or citations to pursue. But do not use it for information you must cite.

4. **Question your topic.** This is a crucial step. Once you have a topic, question it. Make a list of all the questions that you can imagine answering.

5. **Bounce ideas off friends.** They may have ideas that are interesting but in your view wrong, that are in your view right but not properly developed, or that just plain surprise you. These ideas might help you find a worthy research question.

6. **Evaluate your questions.** Finally, evaluate your questions and scrap those unlikely to yield interesting answers.

Here are some signs of a question you can't use:

1. You can answer the question too easily.

2. No one can plausibly *disprove* the answer, because it seems self-evident or obvious.

3. You can't find factual evidence to support the answer.

4. You would find so many sources that you cannot look at most of them.

The crucial point is to find a question that *you* really want to answer. Too many students, even advanced ones, think that education means memorizing the right answers to questions someone else has asked and answered. It is not. Among your most important goals for your education should be to learn to ask your own questions and find your own answers.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 26–39.

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE OF RESEARCH—ASSIGNMENTS

Don't let the academic language of research intimidate you. Here are some commonly used words in research assignments that basically mean the same thing:

explore X	critique X
discuss X	investigate X
analyze X	compare X with Y
explain X	discuss X in light of Y

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 29–30.

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE OF RESEARCH—HOW TO POSITION YOUR IDEA

You may need to find your topic and question in relation to something you read, either because your teacher assigned a text or because you have found a writer or a work that interests you. In that case, look for surprises, puzzles, or disagreements. Or you can also look for ways to make the text itself your guide.

Here are some common sentence stems that can help get your ideas in writing, particularly in the preliminary stages of your project:

1. **Kind:** "Smith claims that _____ belongs in category A, but I will show that it really belongs in category B."

   Smith claims that fringe religious groups are "cults" because of their strange beliefs, but I will show that those beliefs are no different in kind from standard religions.

2. **Part-Whole:** "Smith claims that _[*whole*]_ always has _[*part*]_ as one of its defining features/components/qualities, but I will show that _[*part*]_ is not essential."

   Smith claims that competition is the essence of sport, but I will show that, even by her standards, competition is only incidental to the way most people actually play sports.

3. **Change:** "Smith claims that _____ is changing in a certain way, but I will show that it is really the same as it was/it is really changing in a different way."

   Smith claims that social media marketing will let consumers get the products they want and need, but I will show that this will really let companies manipulate their customers more than ever.

4. **Cause and Effect:** "Smith claims that _____ is caused by _____, but I will show that it is really caused by _____."

   Smith claims that the collapse of the banking system was caused by greed and a lack of government oversight, but I will show that the real cause was that financial instruments became so complicated that no one could evaluate their risks.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 34–35.

TELL AND RETELL YOUR ELEVATOR STORY

As soon as you have a working hypothesis and a few reasons, create an elevator story.

Imagine that you step in an elevator and find your teacher, who asks, "So, how's the paper going? What do you expect to say?" You have only a couple of floors to sum up where you are. Early on, you can use this plan:

1. I am working on the problem of [state your question].

2. I think I can show that [state your hypothesis] because [state your reasons].

3. My best evidence is [summarize your evidence].

If you have a study group, have everyone tell their elevator story at the start of every meeting. If not, tell yours to anyone who will listen—a friend, a parent, even your dog will do. As you learn more and your argument develops, refine your elevator story and tell it again. The more you summarize your argument in an elevator story, the sooner your paper will come together.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 43.

FINDING RELEVANT AND RELIABLE SOURCES

You will probably find more sources than you can use, and you should always evaluate their relevance and reliability.

A relevant source includes (1) data you can use as evidence, (2) discussions of matters you plan to discuss, and/or (3) arguments that show you how others are thinking about your question. **To find out if a source is relevant,** skim the key parts of the text for names or terms related to your question or its answers. The key parts of a text are usually any section or chapter titled "introduction" or "conclusion," any subheadings or chapter titles, and the first paragraph or two after each after subheading or chapter title.

Also, your evidence will not be persuasive if it comes from a source your readers don't trust. You can't judge a source until you read it, but there are signs of reliability. **To find out if a source is reliable,** consider whether you found it in a library's collections or whether it seems like a work of high enough quality to be in a library.

Evaluating Online Sources

Use particular care in evaluating the reliability of online sources. Look for the following signs of a reliable source:

1. It is associated with a reputable organization, university, journal, or publisher.
2. It does not present only one side of a contested political or social issue or appear to be selling something.
3. It does not use abusive language or make errors of spelling, punctuation, or grammar.
4. It says who is responsible for the site and when it was updated. If it has no date, be cautious.
5. It is not too glossy. When a site has more decorative graphics than words, its designers may care more about drawing you in than about presenting reliable information. If a site has almost no graphics, that may be a sign of neglect, but it might also indicate that its creator cares more about the quality of the words than the look of the page.

Trust an online source only if careful readers would trust those who maintain it. If you don't know who maintains it, be skeptical.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 52–54.

WRITE AS YOU READ

Writing forces you to think hard, so don't wait to nail down a budding idea before you write it out. Experienced researchers know that the more they write, the sooner and better they understand their project.

There is good evidence that successful researchers set a fixed time to write each day. They might only write a paragraph, but they write *something*, not to start a first draft of their report, but to sort out their ideas and maybe discover new ones.

If you write something that seems promising, be sure to keep a copy of it. You will probably revise it for your final draft, maybe even discard it. But no matter how sketchy or rough this early writing might be, it will help you draft more easily later.

Cautions

Don't expect too much of your early writings. If you're new to a topic, much of your early writing may be just summary and paraphrase. If you see too few of your own ideas, don't be discouraged. Summarizing and paraphrasing are how we all gain control over new ideas and learn new ways of thinking. Rehashing what we want to understand is a typical, probably even necessary, stage in just about everyone's learning curve.

Also, keep in mind that all researchers experience moments of panic when their task seems too complex and unmanageable. The best way to get past such moments is to keep moving along, following your plan. This is another reason to start early, to break a big project into its smallest steps, and to set achievable goals.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 60–62.

HOW ARGUMENTS GROW FROM QUESTIONS

The argument in a research paper is different from the loud, nasty arguments between opponents that occur in the media. A research argument is like an amiable conversation in which you and your readers reason together to solve a problem. But those readers won't accept that solution until they hear a good case for it: good reasons, reliable evidence that grounds those reasons, and your responses to their reasonable questions and reservations.

Your argument can answer your readers' questions only if you can first imagine those readers asking those questions for you to answer. After all, each of us can believe what we want, for whatever reason we want, but we have no right to ask others to believe it unless we can give them good reasons to do so, reasons that make sense *from their point of view.*

This sounds challenging, but it's more familiar than you may think, because in fact you have that kind of conversation every day with your family, your friends, and your classmates.

As you build your argument, make sure you can answer these five questions:

1. What is your claim?
2. What reasons support it?
3. What evidence supports those reasons?
4. How do you respond to objections and alternative views?
5. How are your reasons relevant to your claim?

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 63–65.

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE OF RESEARCH—ACKNOWLEDGING AND RESPONDING

Recall that a research argument is not a one-sided lecture to passive listeners but a two-sided conversation in which you speak with and for your readers. You must *acknowledge* the questions and objections your readers might raise and then *respond* to them.

Use the following language and sentence stems to help you acknowledge and respond to anticipated questions or objections:

Forms for Acknowledging

1. You can downplay an alternative by summarizing it in a short phrase introduced with *despite, regardless of, notwithstanding, although, while,* or *even though*.

   Despite *Congress's claims that it wants to cut taxes,*$_{\text{acknowledgment}}$ *the public believes that . . .*$_{\text{response}}$

2. You can signal an alternative with *seem* or *appear*, or with a qualifying adverb, such as *plausibly, reasonably, understandably, surprisingly, foolishly,* or even *certainly.*

   In his letters, Lincoln expresses what **appears** *to be depression.*$_{\text{acknowledgment}}$ *But those who observed him . . .*$_{\text{response}}$

3. You can acknowledge an alternative without naming its source. This gives it just a little weight. If you name the source, that gives it more weight.

   Some evidence *might suggest that we should . . .*

   Jones *claims that we should . . .*

4. You can acknowledge an alternative in your own voice or with adverbs such as *admittedly, granted, to be sure,* and so on. This construction admits that the alternative has some validity, but by changing the words, you can qualify how valid you think it is.

   We have to ***raise*** *the* ***possibility*** *that further study* ***might*** *show . . .*

   We have to ***consider*** *the* ***probability*** *that further study* ***will*** *show . . .*

Forms for Responding

1. You can state that you don't entirely understand someone's objection.

   It is not clear to me that . . .

2. Or you can state that there are unsettled issues with someone's objection.

   But there are other issues . . .

3. You can respond more bluntly by claiming the acknowledged person is irrelevant or unreliable.

   But the evidence is unreliable . . .

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 68, 70–72.

PLANNING YOUR DRAFT

When you first assemble your argument, you don't have to put your reasons in any special order. But when you plan a draft, you must choose an order that meets your readers' needs. When you're not sure how best to order your reasons, consider these options.

1. **Chronological.** This is the easiest order, from earlier to later, or vice versa.

2. **Part by part.** If you analyze your topic by its parts, order them by their relationship to one another.

3. **Short to long, simple to complex**. Most readers prefer to deal with simpler issues before they work through more complex ones.

4. **More familiar to less familiar.** Most readers prefer to read what they know about before they read what's new.

5. **Most acceptable to most contestable.** Most readers move more easily from what they agree with to what they don't.

6. **Less important to more important (or vice versa).** Most readers prefer to cover more important reasons first (but those reasons may have more impact when they come last).

7. **Step-by-step understanding.** Readers may need you to explain some events, principles, definitions, and so on before they are ready to understand what's most important.

To test an order, create one paragraph that includes just your reasons in the order you want to test. If that paragraph reads like a convincing elevator story, then you have found a useful order.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 81.

WORKING THROUGH WRITER'S BLOCK: GETTING UNSTUCK

If you can't get started on a first draft or struggle to draft more than a few words, you may have writer's block. Some cases arise from anxieties about school and its pressures; if that sounds like you, consider seeing a counselor. But most cases have causes that you can address.

1. **You may be stuck because you have no goals or goals that are too high.** Set goals that are small and achievable. Then create a routine that helps you achieve them.

2. **You may feel so overwhelmed by the project that you don't know where to begin.** If so, break the process into small achievable tasks; then focus on doing one at a time.

3. **You may think that you have to make every sentence or paragraph perfect before you move on to the next one.** You don't. Tell yourself you're not writing a final draft but only sketching out some ideas, grit your teeth, then do some quick writing to get yourself started.

Quick Tip: Getting Unstuck

If you have problems like this with most of your writing, talk to your teacher. Teachers have worked with every kind of procrastinator and blocked writer and can tailor their advice to your problem.

On the other hand, some cases of writer's block are opportunities to let your ideas simmer in your subconscious while they combine and recombine into something new and surprising. If you're stuck *and* have time (another reason to start early), do something else for a day or two. Then return to the task to see if you can get back on track.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 86–87.

WHEN TO QUOTE, PARAPHRASE, OR SUMMARIZE

You can present information from a source in the source's words or in your own. Which you choose depends on how you plan to use the information in your argument, but also on the kind of paper you are writing, since different fields use quotation, paraphrase, and summary in different proportions.

Summarize when details are irrelevant or a source isn't important enough to warrant the space.

Paraphrase when you can state what a source says more clearly or concisely than the source does, or when your argument depends on the details in a source but not on its specific words.

Quote for these purposes:

1. The quoted words themselves are your evidence, and you need to deal with them exactly as they appeared in the original.

2. The quoted words are highly original, well expressed, odd, or otherwise too useful to lose in paraphrase.

3. The passage states a view that you disagree with, and to be fair you want to state it exactly.

4. The passage is from an authority who backs up your view.

5. The passage expresses your key concepts so clearly that the quotation can frame the rest of your discussion.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 89–90.

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE OF RESEARCH—VERBS FOR INTRODUCING A QUOTATION OR PARAPHRASE

Here is a quick guide to some of the verbs that introduce quotations and paraphrases.

All-Purpose Verbs

These are **neutral**: Source *says* that . . . (also: *writes, adds, notes, comments*)

These indicate **how strongly the source feels** about the information: Source *emphasizes* that . . . (also: *affirms, asserts, explains, suggests, hints*)

These indicate that the information is **a problem for the source:** Source *admits* that . . . (also: *acknowledges, grants, allows*)

Verbs for Argued Claims

These are **neutral:** Source *claims* that . . . (also: *argues, reasons, contends, maintains, holds*)

These indicate that you find the claim **convincing**: Source *proves* that . . . (also: *shows, demonstrates, determines*)

Verbs for Opinions

These are **neutral**: Source *thinks* that . . . (also: *believes, assumes, insists, declares*)

These indicate that you find the opinion **weak** or **irresponsible**: Source *wants to think* that . . . (also: *wants to believe, just assumes, merely takes for granted*)

Verbs for Matters of Judgment

Source *judges* that . . . (also: *concludes, infers*)

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 95–96.

THREE PRINCIPLES FOR CITING SOURCES

When you use any source in any way, readers expect you to follow three principles. You risk a charge of plagiarism if you ignore any one of them.

1. **You must cite the source for any words, ideas, or methods that are not your own.**

   Writers can avoid paraphrasing too closely if they focus on remembering what they understand from the original, not its actual words. One way to do this is to put the original aside as you write the paraphrase (Colomb and Williams, 92). But a better way is to imagine you are explaining the idea to someone who hasn't read the original.

2. **When you quote the exact words of a source, you must put those words in quotation marks or a block quotation, even if you cite the source in your own text.**

   For example, this would be plagiarism:

   According to Colomb and Williams, when you quote the exact words of a source, you must put those words in quotation marks or a block quotation, even if you cite the source in your own text (100).

3. **When you paraphrase the words of a source, you must use your own sentences, not sentences so similar to the original that they are almost a quotation.**

   For example, this would be considered plagiarism by many teachers:

   According to Colomb and Williams, you risk being charged with plagiarism when you paraphrase a passage from a source not in your own words but in sentences so similar to it that you almost quote them regardless of whether your own text cites the source (100).

Some students think they don't have to cite material available for free online. Not so. These principles apply to sources of any kind—printed, recorded, oral, and online. You risk a charge of plagiarism if you fail to cite *anything* you get from a source, *especially* if it's from a website, a database, a podcast, or another online source. A source is a source, and you must cite them all.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 99–100.

THE DRAMATIC PATTERN OF INTRODUCTIONS AND FAIRY TALES

The typical introduction to a research paper draws some of its ability to motivate readers from the dramatic pattern it shares with fairy tales:

1. **Current Situation / *Once upon a time . . .***

   The fairy tale defines a stable world that it will disrupt; the research paper defines a current way of thinking that it will show to be wrong, or at least inadequate.

2. **Research Question / *But then, the dragon . . .***

   The fairy tale disrupts its world with a problem creature; the research paper disrupts the current way of thinking with a problem question.

3. **Significance of the Question / *And now the dragon's fire . . .***

   The fairy tale puts its main character in danger; the research paper shows its readers what they will lose without an answer to its question.

4. **Answer / *And they lived happily ever after.***

   In the fairy tale, a helper with special powers steps in to remove the danger, thereby saving the day; in the research paper, the writer with special knowledge (learned from research) steps in to answer the question, thereby saving the day.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 121.

WRITING AN INTRODUCTION

Although it's sometimes difficult to write the first sentence of an introduction, avoid falling into clichés:

1. **Do not repeat the language of your assignment.**
2. **Do not quote a dictionary definition:** *The dictionary defines risk as . . .*
3. **Do not try to be grand:** *For centuries philosophers have debated the burning question of . . .*

Instead, try one of the following openers:

1. **A striking quotation:**

   "If you're old enough to fight for your country, you're old enough to drink to it."

2. **A striking fact:**

   A recent study reports that at most colleges three out of four students "binged" at least once in the previous thirty days, consuming more than seven drinks at a sitting. Almost half binge once a week, and those who binge most are not just members of fraternities, but their officers.

3. **A relevant anecdote:**

   When Jim S., president of Alpha Omega, joined his fourth-year fraternity brothers in the State U tradition of "a fifth in your fourth," by downing most of a fifth of whiskey in less than an hour, he didn't plan to become this year's eighth college fatality from alcohol poisoning.

4. **A combination of all three:**

   *It is often said that "if you're old enough to fight for your country, you're old enough to drink to it."*quotation *Tragically, Jim S., president of Alpha Omega, no longer has a chance to do either. When he joined his fourth-year fraternity brothers in the State U tradition of "a fifth in your fourth," by downing most of a fifth of whiskey in less than an hour, he didn't expect to become this year's eighth college fatality from alcohol poisoning.*anecdote *According to a recent study, at most colleges three out of four students have, like Jim S., drunk seven drinks at a sitting in the last thirty days. And those who drink the most are not just members of fraternities, but, like Jim S., officers.*striking fact

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 125–26.

DRAFTING A CONCLUSION

You can build your conclusion around the elements of your introduction, in reverse order.

1. **Restate your claim early in your conclusion, more fully than in your introduction:**

   Bingeing college students may be irrational when they ignore risks that they know well, but they are not acting without some reason. Our survey shows that students more likely to binge hear and remember more stories of bingeing among their peers than do students less likely to binge. As a consequence, bingers believe that bingeing is far more prevalent than it is. And since they are unlikely to know anyone who has suffered direct harm from bingeing, they believe that their chances of being harmed are quite low.

2. **Remind readers of the significance of your claim or, better, state a new significance or a practical application:**

   These findings suggest bingeing may be less irrational, less a matter of uncontrollable impulses than at first it might seem. If one cause of bingeing is the common practice of bragging about one's exploits at parties and bars, it may be possible to counter the effects of those stories with simple facts. If students know that bingeing is not the norm among students, they may think more carefully when they assess its risks.

3. **Finally, suggest other questions that your results might raise:**

   Although these results improve our understanding of the causes of bingeing, they do not tell us how to counter the effects of overestimating the prevalence of bingeing. There is no evidence to show that we can counter the effects of vivid and exciting stories told by peers with dry facts recited by college administrators. There is more research to do before we can know how to use these results effectively.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 126–27.

WRITING YOUR TITLE

Your title is the first thing your readers read; it should be the last thing you write. It should both announce the topic of your paper and signal its important concepts.

Compare these three titles:

1. **"Bingeing"**
2. **"Ignoring the Risks of Bingeing"**
3. **"A Story Is Worth a Thousand Facts: Why Binge Drinkers Overestimate the Prevalence and Underestimate the Risks of Bingeing"**

The first title is accurate but too general. The second is more specific, but the third is the most useful for readers because it gives them a clear and full sense of what will be in the paper.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 127.

REVISING YOUR DRAFT: SHAPE (ORGANIZATION), INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION, SENTENCE LEVEL

Some students think that once they have a draft, they're done. Thoughtful writers know better. They write a first draft to see whether they can make a case to support their answer. Then they revise their draft until they think they've presented that case in a way that meets the needs and expectations of their readers.

1. **Check your introduction, conclusion, and claim.** Your readers must see three things quickly: where your introduction ends, where your conclusion begins, and what sentences in your introduction and conclusion state your main claim.

2. **Make sure the body of your report makes sense.** Readers will think your report makes sense when they see the key terms that run through your whole report, where each section ends and the next begins, how each section relates to the one before it, what role each section plays in the whole, what sentence in each section and subsection states its point, and what key terms run through each section.

3. **Check your paragraphs.** Each paragraph should be relevant to the point of its section. Make sure you have good paragraph structure, with an introductory sentence, a concluding sentence, and key concepts. Avoid strings of short paragraphs (fewer than five lines) or very long ones (more than half a page).

4. **Let your draft cool, then paraphrase it.** When you return to your draft, read it by sections, skimming it like you would skim a source. Then, based on what you have read, paraphrase it for someone who hasn't read it. Does the paraphrase hang together? Does it fairly sum up your argument?

5. **If your teacher comments on your draft, always revise it in light of that advice.** Otherwise, you will miss an opportunity to improve your paper. This includes comments about spelling and grammar as well as structure.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), chaps. 12, 13, and 14.

FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR CLEAR SENTENCES

To draft clear sentences or revise unclear ones, follow these five principles:

1. Make subjects short and concrete, ideally naming the character that performs the action expressed by the verb that follows.
2. Avoid interrupting the subject and verb with more than a word or two.
3. Put key actions in verbs, not in nouns.
4. Put information familiar to readers at the beginning of a sentence, new information at the end.
5. Avoid long introductory phrases: get to a short, familiar subject quickly.

Skim the first seven or eight words of every sentence you've written to make sure they meet these criteria.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 130.

ACCEPTING FEEDBACK

Teachers are baffled and annoyed when a student looks only at the grade on a paper and ignores substantive comments. Since you'll write many research papers in your life, it's smart to understand how your teachers make their judgments and how you can use them to do better next time.

When you read your teacher's comments, focus on those that you can apply to your next project:

1. Look for a pattern of errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. If you see one, make a list so that you know what to work on next time.

2. If your teacher says you made factual errors, check your notes to see why. Did you misreport them? Were you misled by an unreliable source?

3. If your teacher says your writing is choppy, dense, or awkward, check your sentences against the five rules for writing clear sentences.

4. If your teacher says your report is disorganized, check it against the guide to revising your draft.

Next, you should meet with your teacher. Complete these tasks before you talk to your teacher:

1. If your teacher marked up spelling and grammar mistakes, correct those errors.

2. Jot down your responses after any comments about your argument to show that you've read them closely.

In your meeting with the teacher:

1. Don't whine about your grade.

2. Focus on the most important comments. Rehearse your questions so they seem polite.

3. Don't ask, "What didn't you like?" but "Where did I go wrong and how would I fix it?"

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 139.

WHY CITE SOURCES?

You have two kinds of reasons for doing the work to create citations that are complete, accurate, and in the proper format.

First are the reasons that all researchers share:

1. To be honest about what you did and what you borrowed.
2. To assure readers that they can trust your evidence.
3. To tell readers which earlier researchers informed your work.
4. To help readers follow or extend your research.

Second are the more immediate, self-interested reasons:

5. To avoid having your grade lowered.
6. To avoid failing your course, being charged with plagiarism, and losing your teacher's trust.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers,* 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 145–46.